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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: ALEX RONDELI: THE UNM SHIP MIGHT STILL FLOAT

REF: TBILISI 2454

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) Alex Rondeli, Director of the Georgian Foundation for Security and International Studies (GFSIS) and widely respected political analyst, shared his views on recent political developments and media professionalism with the DCM on December 26. Rondeli wasn't surprised by reports of Patarkatsishvili's coup plot and expressed admiration for the effectiveness the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MOIA) sting operation that uncovered the threat. He believes Patarkatsishvili felt safe in meeting MOIA official Kodua in London based on Marina Gabunia's recommendation after meeting Kodua and Gelbakhiani's recommendation after his two meetings. According to Rondeli, Patarkatsishvili asked Gabunia, a former judge who was dismissed for corruption, to make the first pitch to Kodua because she had a past romantic relationship with him.

¶2. (C) When asked what he thought Patarkatsishvili might do as a Plan B if the coup plans are foiled, he responded that Plan A had been the November demonstrations and the coup plot is Plan B. Rondeli believes Patarkatsishvili had hoped to use the early November demonstrations to topple Saakashvili but the strong government response on November 7 turned the tide. Rondeli's greatest worry now is an assassination attempt on an opposition candidate that would be blamed on Saakashvili's supporters. Rondeli recalled discussions he had in Berlin in October when he alerted the German Foreign Ministry to the risk that anti-Saakashvili forces could assassinate Okruashvili to weaken the Georgian government, and thinks this concern led the Germans to finally arrest Okruashvili to keep him from harm.

¶3. (C) Rondeli expressed his view that the Georgian people accept as credible the evidence of Patarkatsishvili's coup plot and are shocked and angered by it. He thinks the majority of Georgians will assume calls for demonstrations on January 6 will be part of Patarkatsishvili's plot and they now want to hear from the candidates whether they support the election or support demonstrations. Rondeli believes United Opposition candidate Gachechiladze, whom he has known since a child, is a dirty politician and knew about Patarkatsishvili's plans. He also believes that the opposition candidates have been slow to denounce Patarkatsishvili because all of them (with the probable exception of Usupashvili and the Republicans) have received financing from Patarkatsishvili. Rondeli sees the fingerprints of the Russian FSB on Patarkatsishvili's plot and argues the Kremlin would not let such an opportunity to topple Saakashvili pass untried.

¶4. (C) Rondeli said the ad hoc media watchdog group that Adam Michnik formed in early December is effective as a moral force that journalists are paying attention to. The group is composed of seven professionals hand picked by Michnik

from media, NGOs and think-tanks. The group convenes at the public TV station on Friday evenings for one hour of air time set aside for discussion and rendering of opinions about news coverage by the various TV stations. Rondeli said he believes the Michnik group is helping to set fair journalism standards and that the TV stations are listening and striving to avoid criticisms. According to Rondeli the Michnik group has found no serious problems with professional standards since beginning its work two weeks ago. The group plans to meet twice more and at this point has no intention of continuing beyond the January 5 election.

15. (C) Rondeli explained that there is no conflict with the Media Council formed by the government because the Council has a more technical role, to track TV programming to ensure that regulatory standards are met, such as balanced coverage of the presidential candidates during the election. Rondeli believes the combination of the Michnik group and the Media Council has achieved the goal of improved journalistic professionalism during the election period and Georgia will have to consider how best to maintain these standards after January 5 and during future elections.

16. (C) Comment: Rondeli was depressed and very critical of the government following the November 7 crack down on demonstrations. He even advised Lado Gurgenidze, whom he says was the most gifted of his former students, against accepting Saakashvili's offer to be Prime Minister and thereby joining a sinking ship. However, over the past few weeks he has come to a grudging acceptance of the government's actions as necessary real politik and now believes the United National Movement's ship might still float after the election. He thinks demonstrations on January 6 are unavoidable. He believes the international

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community has an extremely important role to play because the strength and danger of the demonstrations will depend on how clear the international community's verdict on the elections will be. He concedes that we are in a very dangerous and confusing period for Georgia and he does not have a clear idea how this will play out. End Comment.

TEFFT